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ABSTRACT

How could handchipped stones, ancient ruins, old broken dishes, and antiquated garbage help students learn about the world and themselves? Within archaeology, these seemingly irrelevant items can enlighten students about the world around them through science, culture, and history. When teaching archaeology in the classroom, educators can lead students on learning adventures while engaging them in thinking about life in the past and who they are as humans today. This ERIC Digest discusses: (1) the discipline of archaeology; (2) archaeology in the classroom; and (3) resources for teaching archaeology. The Digest defines archaeology, describes the archaeological process, and explains the wide range of topics covered when teaching archaeology. Resources are available for educators to integrate archaeology into their lessons, and several organizations, including the Society for American Archaeology (SAA), are listed, including the mailing address, and/or web site address. In-depth information about SAA is provided, including publications and a Web site address of the network of State and Provincial Archaeology Education Coordinators supported by SAA. Information is given about programs and courses that allow educators to participate in ongoing archaeological projects and synthesize what they learn in the field into their teaching. (LB)

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Teaching Archaeology

By Gail William Brown

How could handchipped stones, ancient ruins, old broken dishes, and antiquated garbage help students learn about the world and themselves? Within archaeology, these seemingly irrelevant items can enlighten students about the world around them through science, culture, and history. By using archaeology in the classroom, educators can lead students on learning adventures while engaging them in thinking about life in the past and who we are as humans today. This Digest discusses (1) the discipline of archaeology, (2) archaeology in the classroom, and (3) resources for teaching archaeology.

The Discipline of Archaeology. Archaeology is one of four subfields of anthropology; the others are cultural anthropology, linguistics, and physical anthropology.

Archaeology is the scientific study of past human cultures through their physical remains. By studying the remains of objects people created in the past, archaeologists can understand how those people lived and interacted with each other. Prehistoric archaeologists study cultures without written histories. Historical archaeologists study cultures with written records, and usually focus on the diffusion of those cultures throughout the world.

The archaeological process begins well before an archaeologist moves the first shovel of dirt. Archaeologists first develop questions about past life that they want to answer. They base these questions in the social sciences and seek answers through scientific methods.

After determining their questions, archaeologists seek data to answer them. Archaeologists find these data through either excavations in the field or collections of already excavated materials. Archaeologists do not dig a site simply because it is there. If the site will not answer their questions, archaeologists try to preserve the site for future generations to excavate. Even when a site will answer their questions, archaeologists do not begin digging without a carefully constructed plan.

It is the job of archaeologists to record as much information as they can about the sites they study. To be certain they record the information properly, archaeologists must choose the appropriate methods to study sites based on the types of sites and the environments of their locations. Only when the appropriate excavation and documentation methods have been determined will archaeologists begin a study.

After examining their data from previous collections or field projects, archaeologists usually write the answers to their questions and other findings in technical reports. Archaeologists also may wish to share their findings with the public by producing material for the popular media, creating exhibits, or presenting public lectures.

Archaeology is a very diverse field, which allows it to draw upon experts and data from different fields. This diversity also makes archaeology ideal for the classroom because educators can integrate it with many subjects in the school curriculum.

Using Archaeology in the Classroom. Archaeology can provide links with both the distant and the not-so-distant past. Archaeology also offers the opportunity to explore the development of and variation among modern human societies. By exploring these variations students can better appreciate the diversity of human life (Formal Education Subcommittee, Public Education Committee 1995, 2).

Archaeology, with its multidisciplinary approach, can teach students a wide range of topics:

- Students can learn scientific method—developing hypotheses, testing, recording, and theory building—while learning about the past.
- Laying out and mapping archaeological sites teaches students math, geometry, mapmaking and reading skills, and geography.
- By working in teams like many archaeologists, students learn communication and interpersonal skills.
- Educators can address various historic topics, explore the ways in which humans record history (in writing, orally, and archaeologically), and illustrate how together these different forms of recorded history offer a clearer view of the past.
- Students can learn biology by analyzing plant and animal remains.
- When studying artifacts, students can use their imaginations to learn how the artifacts functioned, and what meanings their creators assigned to them.
- Archaeological activities can provide many hands-on experiences, allowing students to learn while participating.
- Students can learn critical thinking skills while trying to piece together the puzzle of the past and understand how people have lived.

Resources for Teaching Archaeology. Many resources are available for educators to integrate archaeology into their lessons. These resources usually can be found through archaeological societies and federal and state agencies. Many of these organizations maintain lists of books, lesson and activity plans, videotapes, posters, and other resources available for educators.

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Some of these organizations include:

• *The Society for American Archaeology*, 900 Second Street NE, #12, Washington, D.C. 20002; (202) 789-8200; <www.saa.org>

• *The Society for Historical Archaeology*, P.O. Box 30446, Tucson, AZ 85751; (520) 886-8006; <www.sha.org>

• *Anthropology Outreach Office*, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560; (202) 357-1592; <www.nmnh.si.edu/anthro/outreach/outrch1.html>

• *Archaeological Institute of America*, 658 Beacon St., Boston, MA 02215; (617) 353-9361; <www.archaeological.org>

• *Archaeology and Ethnography Program (2275)*, National Park Service, 1849 C Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20240; (202) 343-4101; <www.cr.nps.gov/toolsfor.html>

• *The Anasazi Heritage Center*, Bureau of Land Management, 27501 Highway 184, Dolores, CO 81323; (970) 882-4811; <www.co.blm.gov:80/ahc/projarc.htm>

• *National Register of Historic Places, Teaching With Historic Places*, <www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp/home.html>

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) produces *Archaeology in the Classroom*, which contains guidelines for evaluating archaeology education materials. SAA's Public Education Committee also produces publications for teaching archaeology. *Archaeology and Public Education* is a quarterly Web-based newsletter in which educators can find information on programs, lesson plans, and other resources. The Public Education Committee also is initiating a monograph series geared for educators. The monographs will contain information on archaeological topics and information on how to incorporate those topics into K-12 classrooms.

Educators can find regional and local resources through local archaeological societies and archaeologists working within their state and local governments. Several states organize archaeology week celebrations. During these events educators can find many archaeological programs and resources geared toward both the general public and educators. For more information on these events, individuals can contact their state historic preservation office or state archaeologist.

The Society for American Archaeology also supports a network of State and Provincial Archaeology Education Coordinators. These coordinators from throughout North America can provide information on archaeological programs and activities in their areas. The Society for American Archaeology lists these coordinators on its Web site at <www.saa.org/Organization/Committees/n-penet.html>. By using local resources and examples, educators can place their local history and culture into the larger world context.

Educators also can take advantage of programs that allow them to participate in ongoing archaeological projects. Organizations such as the Center for American Archaeology, P.O. Box 366, Kampsville, IL 62053, (618) 653-4316, <www.caa-archaeology.org> and Crow Canyon Archaeological Center, 23390 County Road K, Cortez, CO 81321, (800) 422-8975, <crowcanyon.com> provide programs that allow educators to learn firsthand about archaeology through participation. They also offer courses to help educators synthesize what they learn in the field into their teaching.

References and ERIC Resources. The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2852; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from commercial reprint services.

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